

Project Oceanology

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To: Education Committee

From: Thaxter Tewksbury
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Re: Education Issues
Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program
S.B. No. 942, Section 16, Subsection (a)

Dear Education Committee Members,

I am writing to urge you to continue funding the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program and to maintain access to this program for organizations and students from throughout Connecticut. This grant program has served thousands upon thousands of students in Connecticut since its inception in 1994. My organization, The Interdistrict Committee for Project Oceanology (or Project O), has received IDCG support for over two decades for many successful programs. During this fiscal year we have implemented six different Interdistrict Programs designed to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation and promote high academic achievement of all students in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

The six programs we are operating this fiscal year are Ocean Explorer Academy, Ocean Diversity Institute, Connecticut River Institute, Saturday Ocean Sciences Academy, Connecticut River Connections and the Marine Science Elementary Program. All together, these programs reach fourth to twelfth grade students from throughout Connecticut, throughout the entire year.

Ocean Explorer Academy, Ocean Diversity Institute and Connecticut River Institute all operate during the summer months. They create opportunities for students from elementary through high school and from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds to get together. They have hands-on, brains-on experiences in the classroom, the laboratory, along coastal Connecticut shorelines and out on Long Island Sound and the Connecticut River on board the research vessel Enviro-Lab. Ocean Explorer Academy and Connecticut River Institute are day programs while Ocean Diversity Institute is a four-week residential program based and housed at the Project Oceanology facility at the University of Connecticut at Avery Point. The intense and memorable experiences that students have in these programs give them lifetime memories and life-changing views into the lives of other students and into new career opportunities.

Saturday Ocean Sciences Academy, Connecticut River Connections and the Marine Science Elementary Program all operate during the academic year. All of these programs create opportunities for students from elementary through high school and from different racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds get together, whether it is during the week as part of their school day or on the weekend as a supplemental activity. They work in teams to learn science and literacy as they visit each other's schools and sites to learn about the significance of and their relationship with watersheds, Connecticut's coastal environments and Long Island Sound. Whether they become scientists or not, they leave our programs better able to be knowledgeable citizens able to judge environmental questions first-hand.

I need your help with the following two items:

1. Please do not decrease or eliminate the funding for the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program. Funding for this program has been reduced to nine million dollars in the most recent budget years, all while successful efforts to reduce isolation and promote high academic achievement throughout Connecticut have been growing.

2. Please do not narrow the pool of organizations that are eligible to apply for this funding or students who can benefit from it. Throughout its history, the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program has allowed different organizations from throughout Connecticut to apply for funds to reduce isolation and promote high academic achievement. Project Oceanology, a collaborative of school districts in Connecticut, has participated in this highly competitive grant program and succeeded in seeking funding and then creating unique opportunities for students. The new language would limit Project Oceanology from applying for this funding and cut off thousands of students from all over Connecticut from first-hand, hands-on experiences on the Connecticut shoreline and waters of Long Island Sound.

Please rescind these proposed changes to Section 16, Subsection (a) and reinstate the original wording of section 10-74d of the general statutes, fully fund and allow the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant Program to continue to provide opportunities for agencies from throughout Connecticut, such as Project Oceanology, to reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation and promote high academic achievement of all students in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.